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INTERIOR DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Top Stories

Associated Press: President Trump praises rapid response to Irma in Florida

“President Donald Trump met with federal and state leaders in Florida on Thursday as he surveyed damage from Hurricane Irma and praised the rapid response of the recovery effort. “We have been very, very fast and we had to be,” Trump said at an airport hangar where he was joined by Vice President Mike Pence, Gov. Rick Scott and other leaders.”

TALKING POINTS

- The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and its bureaus have 194 personnel on mission assignments related to Hurricane Irma as of 9/15.
- Hurricane Irma has killed 38 total on the United States mainland (31) and the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands (4) and Puerto Rico (3).
- 430,000 people are without power in Puerto Rico, and 30,000 without power in the USVI.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) staff have continued to provide advance support to FEMA and state partners with real-time field measurements and installing storm-tide sensors along the coasts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Many National Park Service units have been closed and hundreds of personnel are gearing up for damage assessment, debris removal and helping with search and rescue efforts in the region.

- The U.S. military is providing relief to the affected Islands, having C-17 planes deliver food and other necessities, as well as receiving aid from U.S. Navy ships.
- With at least 70 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field stations closed, 18 refuges along Florida’s west coast, including Key West, J.N. “Ding” Darling and Crystal River, face particularly massive flooding and destructive winds.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs is assisting the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes, who have lost power.

Associated Press: US Wildfire Costs Hit Record \$2.3 Billion; Season Isn't Over

“The Forest Service, the nation’s primary firefighting agency, said Thursday it has spent more than \$2 billion, and the Interior Department says it has spent \$345 million. The previous record for combined federal firefighting costs was \$2.1 billion in 2015. Hot, dry weather across the Western U.S. has led to one of the worst fire seasons in a decade, and some climate scientists say global warming is partly to blame. So far this year, U.S. fires have blackened more than 13,000 square miles (34,000 square kilometers). That’s the fourth-highest in a decade, and big fires could burn for several more weeks.”

TALKING POINTS

- Secretary Zinke grew up in the heart of America's timberlands in Montana -

currently home to some of the strongest and deadliest wildfires this season.

- Secretary Zinke's directive applies to all land management bureaus and services within the department that have burnable vegetation.
- The directive is aimed at restoring proven forest management and preemptive fuels reduction practices in order to help prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- Dead and dying timber from previous fires and disease infestation plagues our forests and makes them more prone to catastrophic fires. By thinning these fuels, fires do not gain in intensity and grow as quickly. This makes them safer and more manageable to battle.
- The Trump Administration is taking aggressive and preemptive measures to prevent wildfires and combat their spread through active fuels management versus the previous administration's more "naturalist" approach. The naturalist approach allowed fuels to build up and forests to thicken, making them more prone to wildfires that are more difficult and dangerous to suppress.
- The directive also orders bureaus and services to protect structures and assets like visitors centers, lodges, and infrastructure by thinning the urban-wildland interface.
- This order does not allow commercial timber harvests in National Parks. It does however order preemptive fuels management, like what already happens in parks like Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park.

The Times Independent (Moab, UT): Interior sets new limits on deadlines, length for EIS submissions

"The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) implemented one-year deadlines and set page limits on all future Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) through a secretarial order to its federal agencies. The order — which affects agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS) — has set off mixed reactions from lobbying groups and elected officials, with some praising the move as creating efficiencies and others condemning it, worried that it would "fast track" mineral development projects and limit public participation in environmental processes."

TALKING POINTS

- Interior's action is aimed at getting things done in a more timely manner, helping projects create jobs and wealth sooner than later.
- Public input is very important to the process, and the order allows for any necessary extensions to be granted.
- Streamlining the process impacts every project the department assesses including solar and wind projects, building a new visitor center, and even mineral withdrawals such as the one Secretary Zinke is supporting near Yellowstone National Park in Montana.

Associated Press: Herbert: Zinke Signaled Grand-Staircase Should Be Shrunk

"Utah's governor said Thursday that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has signaled that he's recommending President Donald Trump shrink Utah's two-decade old Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Gov. Gary Herbert doesn't specifically know what Zinke has

recommended for the 1.9-million acre (7,700-square kilometer) area or Utah's new Bears Ears National Monument, but the governor said at his monthly news conference, taped at KUED-TV Thursday, that Zinke felt former President Bill Clinton's 1996 declaration of Grand Staircase-Escalante went too far."

- **Secretary Zinke's statement:**

- "No President should use the authority under the Antiquities Act to restrict public access, prevent hunting and fishing, burden private land, or eliminate traditional land uses, unless such action is needed to protect the object. The recommendations I sent to the president on national monuments will maintain federal ownership of all federal land and protect the land under federal environmental regulations, and also provide a much-needed change for the local communities who border and rely on these lands for hunting and fishing, economic development, traditional uses, and recreation."

- **DOI statement:**

- "The Secretary's draft report has been sent to the White House. The Secretary's summary has been released to the press. Please contact the White House with any questions about any action on the report."

- **White House statement:**

- "President Trump has received Secretary Zinke's draft report for the Antiquities Act, and is currently reviewing his recommendations to determine the best path forward for the American people."
- The Antiquities Act calls for the President to designate the "smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected." Despite this clear directive "smallest area" has become the exception and not the rule.
- In an effort to make the process transparent and give people a voice in the process, the Secretary announced on May 5, 2017 the opening up of a formal comment period for the review. This is the first time ever that a formal comment period was open on [regulations.gov](#) for National Monuments designated under the Antiquities Act.
- Since May, Secretary Zinke has visited eight national monument sites in six states. He's held dozens of meetings with Tribal, local, and state government officials, local stakeholders, and advocates from conservation, agriculture, tourism, and historic preservation organizations. The Secretary meets with people and organizations who represent all sides of the issues.
- Many of the most controversial national monuments were designated or expanded in the waning days of the previous administration after partisan efforts to designate the land stalled in Congress. This is a clear violation of the will of the people and an overuse of executive power.

Fact and Fiction of the Monument Review

- Myth: No president has shrunk a monument.
- Fact: Monuments have been shrunk at least ten times under presidents on both sides of the aisle. Some examples include President John F. Kennedy removing 2,882 acres from Bandelier National Monument, Presidents Taft, Wilson, Coolidge reducing Mount Olympus National Monument (President Wilson halved

it), and President Eisenhower reducing Great Sand Dunes National Monument in Colorado.

- Myth: The monument review will sell/transfer public lands to states.
- Fact: This is not true. Under the Antiquities Act, the monuments are designated on already federal land. Therefore, if any monument is rescinded or shrunk, the land would remain federally owned and be managed by one or more land management agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service.
- Myth: The monument review will close/sell/transfer National Parks.
- Fact: No National Parks are under review, and the Secretary has continually committed he is against the sale/transfer/privatization of public lands, especially National Parks. While some of the monuments are managed by the National Park Service - much like historic sites, national recreation areas, and national seashores are - none of them are National Parks.

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